

Remarks by Ambassador Harry K. Thomas, Jr.
Special Boat Unit (SBU) Patrol Boat Donation & Blessing Ceremony
16 August 2010

Secretary Robredo, Undersecretary Puno, Governor Kahlil, Mayor Hagedorn, military leaders, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen, *magandang umaga sa inyong lahat*.

It is my pleasure to be here this morning to recognize a unique accomplishment in the partnership between the Philippine and U.S. Governments – the Philippine National Police Maritime Group’s Special Boat Unit. It is also my pleasure today to dedicate to service four sophisticated patrol boats for the Unit.

The personnel, facilities, and equipment you see before you represent the realization of a dream, and it took significant time and resources to bring us to this point.

As a maritime country with over 7,000 islands, the Philippines has many, many miles of unguarded coastline. Legitimate commerce and travel bustle through Philippine territorial waters every day, but so do criminals, terrorist elements, and others who would do harm to the Philippines. Policing the maritime environment is vital not only for domestic security but regional and even global security. A strong and sustained maritime policing capability will safeguard the security of all. As you say in the PNP Maritime Group, “By strength and skills, we shall overcome.”

We are proud to work with all our partners on this important project, including Mayor Edward Hagedorn and the City of Puerto Princesa. We have all recognized the importance of investing in the PNP and establishing a viable and professional maritime law enforcement presence. We appreciate your many contributions, all of which are essential for this work.

A lot has happened in this partnership over the last four years. Together, we conceived the dream of a PNP Maritime Group Special Boat Unit. To realize that dream, the PNP recruited

100 new personnel, whom we trained rigorously and developed to the best of their professional abilities. By the looks of those officers I inspected this morning, the Special Boat Unit is ready for action.

Every police unit needs a headquarters, and together we completed the construction of this very impressive facility almost exactly one year ago. Ambassador Kristie Kenney was proud to be at its dedication, just as I am proud to dedicate these four sophisticated and capable patrol boats today.

In the near future, the U.S. Government will provide two more vessels to extend further the reach of the Special Boat Unit. The Philippine National Police is ready and eager to put these new resources to use in patrolling and securing these waters, and we are happy to help. The Special Boat Unit Development Project has been one of our most significant assistance efforts to the PNP, and it has been a great collaborative endeavor.

I would like to note that the effort to create the Special Boat Unit has spanned the administrations of two PNP chiefs, Police Directors General Avelino Razon and Jesus Verzosa, as well as the administrations of three PNP Maritime Group directors, Police Chief Superintendents Angelo Sunglao, Villamor Bumanglag, and Francisco Montenegro.

It is remarkable that the project maintained its focus and momentum through these leadership changes, and it speaks to the clarity of vision that guides the Philippine National Police. I offer my congratulations to each of you gentlemen and your hardworking staff.

BINABATI KO KAYO SA INYONG TAGUMPAY.

The accomplishments we see before us today are not only an important stepping stone for achieving more secure maritime borders against terrorism, smuggling, and transnational crime, but also for combating the scourge of human trafficking.

The crime of human trafficking is particularly heinous, and one that is especially relevant to maritime police work. When human traffickers take their victims from their homes to perform undocumented labor or force them into commercial sexual exploitation, the lives of these victims are destroyed. Trafficking is a global concern, and the Philippines must work with its neighbors to deny traffickers and other criminal and terrorist elements the use of its waterways.

With these new patrol boats, the PNP Maritime Group is the tip of the spear in the fight against human trafficking.

But, as you know, maritime policing and victim rescue operations are a last line of defense. Because human trafficking has no boundaries, partnerships between institutions and between countries to reduce the risk of trafficking and improve the lives of vulnerable individuals are critical to winning the battle. The U.S. Mission to the Philippines has consistently supported development in these areas and will continue to do so in the future.

I commend all of you for what you have achieved thus far. More importantly, I admire you for the work you will do in the future.

The United States remains steadfast in its friendship and commitment to the Republic of the Philippines, and we are very proud of our continuing work with the Special Boat Unit. The U.S. Embassy continues to look for opportunities to expand its partnership with the Philippine National Police and our other private and public partners in Palawan, and we look forward to realizing our collective dream of a safer world. *Maraming salamat at mabuhay kayong lahat.*